

10.11.12 Remarks at Empire State Pride Agenda's 2012 Fall Dinner

Governor Deval L. Patrick

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Thursday, October 11, 2012

Sheraton Hotel and Towers, NYC

Thank you, Louis, for that warm introduction.

Thank you to Justin and Maura for hosting tonight.

And thank you to tonight's honoree Judith Light for your leadership, to be so deservedly recognized in just a minute.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I want to thank you, too, for having me, but most especially for caring about the work of the Empire State Pride Agenda. I share your joy in the year's successes and your determination to win tomorrow's battles. But above all, I want to say a word about common cause.

I grew up on the South Side of Chicago in the fifties and sixties, most of the time on welfare. I lived with my mother and sister, and various other occasional relatives, in my grandparents' 2-bedroom tenement. My mother, sister and I shared one of those bedrooms and a set of bunk beds, so we'd rotate sleeping on the top bunk, the bottom bunk and the floor – every third night on the floor. I went to big, broken, segregated, overcrowded, sometimes violent public schools. I can't remember a time when I didn't love to read, but I don't remember owning a book of my own until 1970, when I was 14 years old, and won a scholarship to Milton Academy, a famed old boarding school outside of Boston.

There were a lot of things we didn't have in my old neighborhood. But one thing we did have was a community. That was a time when every child was under the jurisdiction of every single adult on the block. If you messed up in front of Mrs. Jones's down the street, she'd go upside your head as if you were hers -- and then call home, so you'd get it two times. Despite what so-called conservatives would have you think, there was a lot of emphasis on personal responsibility and hard work. But those adults also wanted us to understand that a community is about seeing your stake in your neighbors' dreams and struggles, as well your own.

I don't remember much talk about guys or gals being "out" – or even about being "in." Our struggles seemed to be about poverty and racism. But there was a sense that social justice was a matter of

common cause, that everybody had a stake in that.

When I was about 10 years old, the Supreme Court ruled in Loving v. Virginia, striking down laws that prohibited blacks and whites from marrying. It didn't touch me directly, but I remember understanding the decision was rooted in the principles of fairness and equality, and that even if that decision wasn't about my present choices, it was still about me. I came to understand that just as it took a community to help me rise from the South Side of Chicago to law school, to the executive ranks of Fortune 500 corporations, and to the Massachusetts State House, it took a community to win equality in that case and many more, to make America better.

These lessons and experiences have helped shape my approach to governing. I believe that government can be a powerful community if it chooses to be, and that it is the job of those of us who serve to actually care about the people we serve. I understand that the struggles of the LGBTQ community are my struggles too. I have a stake in fighting for you and your families because it could just as easily and quickly be my family on the line next.

By the time I came into office in 2007, the Goodridge decision had been law for three years. I was then and am now proud of the fact that Massachusetts was the first to affirm marriage equality, and am able to assure others that in the time since, the sky has not fallen and the earth has not opened to swallow us up. Instead, thousands and thousands of good people – people who contribute to the well-being and vitality of our society – have been free to marry whomever they love. Just as they do in New York now, the people of Massachusetts come before their government as equals.

But the waters had not yet calmed. A constitutional amendment to ban marriage equality was brewing. That very first spring, we beat that back. The next year I signed a bill repealing a centuries old law -- revived by Gov. Romney and others to frustrate marriage equality -- that barred out-of-state couples from marrying in Massachusetts. Then we enacted legislation to grant same-sex couples the same access to Medicaid benefits as heterosexual couples. Last year I signed legislation to extend critical protections to transgender residents seeking housing, employment, credit or post-secondary education and to expand the state's hate crimes statutes to include violence perpetrated against transgender men and women.

Why do we push back against the small-mindedness and the misconceptions and the hate?

Because in a community, **your struggle is my struggle, and my struggle is yours.**

Because, as Dr. King taught us, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." It's never wrong to stand for the principle that people come before their government as equals.

I just didn't always realize how personal this was.

Our youngest daughter tells the story about that day in June 2007 when lawmakers voted down once and for all the constitutional amendment banning marriage equality. A spontaneous celebration erupted outside the State House. While I stood before the crowd on the front steps thanking them for their advocacy and their support, Katherine watched from the crowd. She said later she felt proud of me because of how I fought so publicly for something that didn't affect me. It turned out, in the end, that it did. A few months later, she came out to her mom and me. Katherine's struggles are mine, and mine are hers. That's the way it is in a family – just like in a community.

So the question we must ask ourselves now is this: will we be there for the next struggle? Will you join the next fight for freedom and equality? Even in another state?

More than that, will you join the fight for religious freedom? For racial justice? For basic fairness in the criminal justice and immigration systems? Against the kind of poverty and inequality that is crushing the urban poor and dispiriting the middle class? Will you make your neighbors dreams and struggles your own?

These are not existential questions. In a few weeks' time, we will choose between two very different visions for our country. One maintains that each of us is on his or her own. It turns its back on the left out and left back, and says in essence: "I've got mine, get yours." The other recognizes our common destiny and our common cause, and asks us to turn to each other rather than on each other. One and only one of these competing visions has a place for community.

At the Democratic National Convention last month, I told a story about the Orchard Gardens Elementary School in Boston. Thanks to an infusion of new ideas and tools, and a little new money, this once chronically underperforming school is in the midst of a profound transformation. In less than a year, proficiency measures at Orchard Gardens improved 70 percent. The school has gone from one of the worst schools in the district to one of the best in the state.

At the end of my visit a year and a half ago, the first grade — led by a veteran teacher — gathered to recite for me. After a short poem about multicultural tolerance, they recited much of the "I Have A Dream" speech. When I started to applaud, the teacher said, "not yet." Then she began to ask those 6- and 7-year olds questions: "What does 'creed' mean?" "What does 'nullification' mean?" "Where is Stone Mountain?" And as the hands shot up to answer her questions, I realized that she had taught the children not just to memorize but also to comprehend what they had recited.

The part I left out of the Orchards Gardens story when I told it at the Convention is this: This past February, twenty first-graders from Orchard Gardens arrived in Washington on what was for most of them

their first flight on an airplane. They went to practice reciting the “I Have A Dream” speech one more time, this time under the towering monument honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. on the National Mall. Later that afternoon, they, along with their bashful principal, and their dynamic, loving teacher went to the White House to recite for the President of the United States.

Watching them run around the South Lawn, burning off nervous energy while they waited, or gawking at the unfamiliar splendor of the interiors, or asking where the bathroom is, or staring in bug-eyed disbelief when President Obama entered the Diplomatic Reception Room, they could have been any 6- or 7-year olds. And yet I am certain that they felt important that day simply because someone made them feel worthy. It was extraordinary that that someone was the President of the United States. But what matters most is that *someone* made them feel worthy, that someone had a stake in their dreams and struggles.

If we are to be a national community, with common destiny and common cause, then we must see those children as our children, yours and mine; their struggles as our struggles. For this country to rise, they must rise -- and we have a common stake in that.

So, I celebrate Pride Agenda and its victories for social justice in the LGBTQ community. But I also ask you to see your stake in the broader struggles, too – and to act on it.